

Short communications

The Miombo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* in Tanzania: a note on distribution and breeding

The Miombo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* was described by Britton (1980) as "A local and rather uncommon resident of thick undergrowth in rich miombo woodland and riverine forest at about 1000–1500 m in W Tanzania, from Tukuyu northwest to Kigoma (at Busondo and Nzilandagaza)." Brown & Britton (1980), who provided the first comprehensive summary of the breeding patterns of East African species, listed this species in their category 2 which included species "for which there is no definite East African breeding record". The map in Keith *et al.* (1992) shows a narrow distribution in Tanzania along south-western and western borders with Malawi, Zambia, Lake Tanganyika and Burundi.

As of 1 September 2006 there were 135 records for this species in the Tanzania Bird Atlas Project database (Baker & Baker in prep. *The birds of Tanzania: an atlas of distribution and seasonality*. <http://tanzaniabirdatlas.com>). These amounted to 96 plots for the country, with each plot being a month's record for a given atlas square (see Figure 1). The easternmost records for this species in Tanzania are from Ruaha N.P. within atlas square 3407C (see Figure 1 for explanation of atlas squares). Its range may extend slightly further east as the limit of the western Miombo extends to about 36°E.

Only 14 of the records in the database have altitude data. From these, the lower elevation limit for this species is at 610 m along the Songwe River that flows east to Lake Nyassa along the international boundary with Malawi. The upper limit is around 1650 m in 3006A to the east of Mahale Mts N.P.

In common with most insectivorous bird species found in miombo, the breeding season of Miombo Scrub Robin is in the late dry season and beginning of the rains. This is when leaves in the miombo woodlands first appear and there is an abundance of insect food to feed the young. There are eleven breeding records from Zambia (Benson *et al.* 1973) being August (2), September (4), October (3), and November (2). On 21 November 1990 an adult was seen feeding a recently fledged young bird at Tanda Mbuga in 3108A. Thus, egg laying was most probably in late October. On 24 November 2005, Lasse Lindstrom found a nest containing 3 eggs in open miombo woodland on the western bank of the Gombe River (04°32'43"S, 31°53'07"E). The nest was c. 2.1 m high in the broken stump of a small tree. These two observations constitute the first breeding records for this species from Tanzania.

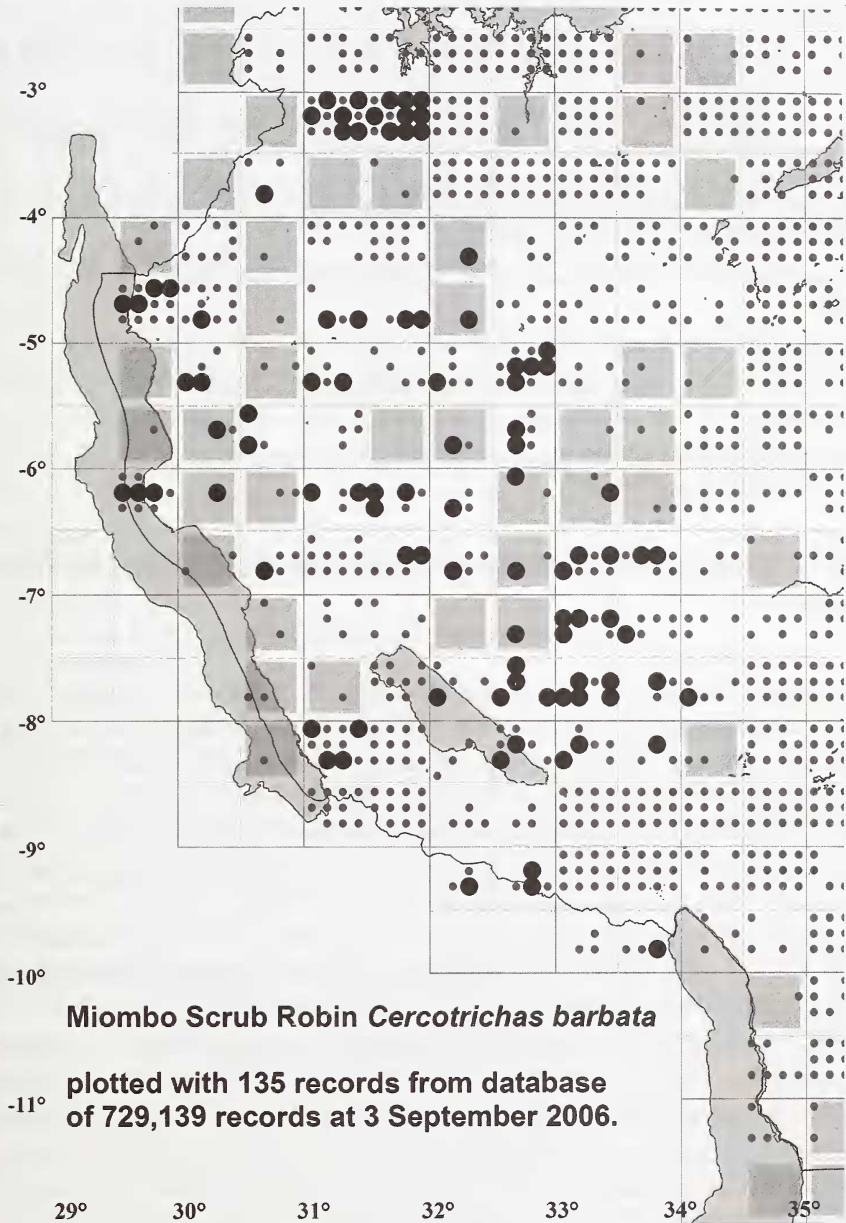


Figure 1. Current distribution of Miombo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* in Tanzania. Each circle indicates the month within the square from January (top left) to December (bottom right). Squares shaded grey are those considered underworked. Small circles show records for the ubiquitous Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* which is used to indicate extent of coverage. A square with no record for this species is considered underworked. Each square is a quarter degree square. It is named by the line of longitude to its west and the line of latitude to its north. A, B, C and D denote its position within the degree square starting top left and working left to right.